

A Pioneer of Rupert's Land

Written by Isaac Cowie



Baker's Custard Pie

Beat the yolks of three eggs to a cream; take one tablespoonful of flour and three of sugar, and sift well; this separates the particles of flour, so there will be no lumps. Then add it to the beaten yolks; put in a pinch of salt, a teaspoonful of vanilla and a little grated nutmeg; next add the well beaten whites of the eggs, and lastly a pint of scalded milk (not boiled) which has been cooled; mix this in by degrees, and turn all into a deep pie pan lined with puff paste and bake from 25 to 30 minutes. For the crust use three large tablespoonfuls of flour, sifted; rubbing into it a large tablespoonful of butter, or lard, or half and half of butter and lard.

ON the 13th of September, 1908, I had the pleasure and privilege of taking down from his own lips, in his old cabin home on the southern bank of the Saskatchewan which commands a magnificent view of the valley and river below and the City of Edmonton on the opposite bank, the following narrative of Joseph McDonald, traveller and trader and trapper, explorer and goldminer, buffalo hunter and cattle rancher, fast dog expressman, boss of packhorse trains, owner of Red River cart brigades, and finally the principal founder of the Town of Strathcona.—Isaac Cowie.

Statement by Joseph McDonald

My father, Donald McDonald, son of Adam McDonald, and his wife, Isabella McKay, was born at Brora, Sutherlandshire, Scotland, on the 7th of April, 1779. He had four brothers, of whom three were soldiers, two slain at Cullin and the third, William (the eldest), fought at Waterloo and was pensioned off. The fourth, Alexander, emigrated to and settled in Nova Scotia.

My father's uncle, Donald McKay, who became known in the Northwest as "Mad McKay," was an officer in the Hudson's Bay Company's service and was in charge of Fort Severn, when he was taken prisoner at York Factory on its

is still the Metis name for Edmonton. "Fort des Prairies" was another name given by the French-speaking to the posts on the upper Saskatchewan River. I saw the old chimneys of one of these old establishments still showing on Groat's Flat in 1855.

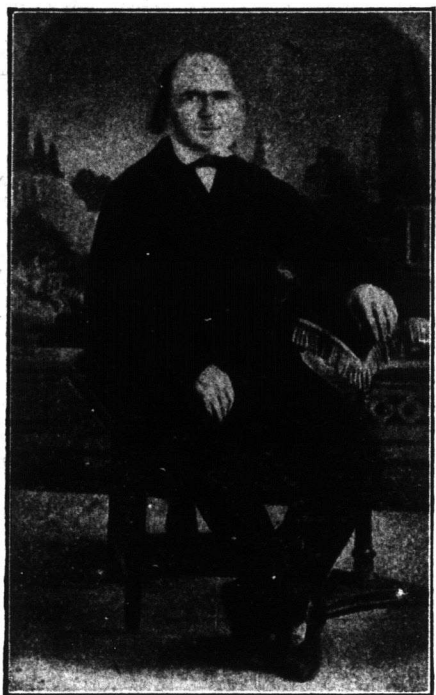
Mr. James Bird was the H.B. officer at Edmonton on my father's arrival there and he remained in charge for many years after. Mr. Bird desired to open up trade with the Blackfeet and their allied tribes, but was much handicapped by the fact that all the natives who could act as interpreters were partisans or in sympathy with the rival North West Company. To remedy this, he called for volunteers to go out and live with the Blackfeet to acquire their language and acquaintanceship. A son of Colonel Munro, who was at the capture of Quebec by Wolfe, named Hugh and my father answered the call, and were placed under the care and protection of a Peigan, "Painted Feather," who was head chief of the Blackfeet Confederacy, having his headquarters generally near Chief Mountain. For this service the chief was subsidized, receiving guns and ammunition and other useful articles to the value of one hundred pounds a year—one of the conditions of the treaty being that a messenger should be sent every two months to Edmonton with word from the chief and his wards.

For three years the two young men lodged in the tents of the Blackfeet, learning their language and their ways, accompanying them in their hunting expeditions, but abstaining from joining their forays on other tribes, while always ready to take part in defending the camp.

Of the Blackfeet Confederacy, the Peigans were the most numerous tribe, next the Blackfeet, then the Bloods and lastly the Grosse Ventres or Big Bellies—from whom the Belly River derives its name. These allies numbered six thousand lodges. The Sarcees, who came originally from about Lesser Slave Lake (hence known as "Slavies" by the H.B. people), were former enemies who joined the federation. Later they occupied the upper Red Deer River to the confines of the grounds of their enemies, the Rocky Mountain Assinaboines. In fact the Sarcees on their first arrival had no friends on the Saskatchewan prairies.

The migration of the Sarcees from the Peace River to the Saskatchewan arose from a chivalrous and self-sacrificing idea. Two brothers were chiefs and a feud broke out between them. Rather than a fratricidal war should be waged in the tribe of Beaver Indians and that he should see those of the same blood slay each other, one of these chiefs led his followers into the hostile Saskatchewan country to fight for life among enemies instead of with their brothers on the Peace River. His band fought their way through to the Athabasca, and for a time occupied the Lac La Nonne country, under constant attack by the Crees in the bush, to escape from which they debouched on the open plains to the south. On these new fields they defended themselves against all comers for many years, and it was not till 1812, anyhow, that they were able to make peace and alliance with the Blackfeet.

In 1810, during the second year of their pilgrimage with the Peigans, in the month of May, a great battle occurred in which Munro and my father took a prominent part in defence of the camp. In anticipation of a long heralded invasion by hostile Crow Indians from the south and Snake, Nez Perce and Flathead Indians from the south and west, the Blackfeet allies had gathered to the number of six thousand lodges on a defensible position, "The Old Man's Bowling Green" (now known as Willow Creek), between the Porcupine Hills and the main Rocky Mountains. To this rallying point of the Peigans came the Big Bellies from Medicine Hat, the Blackfeet from the junction of the High and Bow Rivers, and the Bloods from the Old Man River (near the later "Whoop Up"). Trenches and pits were dug and barricades thrown



Donald McDonald (Joe McDonald's father), war chief of the Black Feet.

surrender in 1782 to the French Admiral LaPerouse. He was carried to Paris and remained three years in a French prison, where he acquired an undying hatred of the French. On his release he came back to this country again in the Hudson's Bay service, from which he took furlough to Scotland in 1805, when he engaged my father to return with him.

Donald McKay was an expert shot and swordsman and duellist. To gratify his aversion to the North West Company—"The French Company"—and to the French in their service, he more than once offered insult and challenged the commander of their forts by clipping the signal halyards with a pistol shot and dousing their colors. He never lost an opportunity of shooting Frenchmen, and while he was in charge of Swan River, he met a canoe of them on Duck Bay, Lake Winnipegosis, shot it full of holes and drowned the whole crew. Then, terrorizing his own crew, he swore them to secrecy, the breach of which he would punish by death. On retiring from the Hudson's Bay service, he went to live with my uncle Alexander, in Nova Scotia, where he died peacefully in bed.

My father was left by his uncle with a friend, Alexander Kennedy, to winter at York Factory, 1805-06. In 1806 he was sent inland to Carlton House, but not agreeing with the master there, Mr. Pruden, he went up with the winter packet (mail) to Edmonton. The two companies—N.W. and H.B.—had forts in that vicinity then. That of the N.W. was known from the name of its master, James Hughes, as Fort "Laure," which

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